ADDRESS OF SENATOR JOHN F. KENNEDY

SENATE FLOOR - APRIL 6

MR. PRESIDENT:

The time has come for the American people to be told the blunt truth about Indo-China.

I am reluctant to make any statement which may be misinterpreted as unappreciative of the gallant French struggle at Dien Bien Phu and elsewhere; or as partisan criticism of our Secretary of State just prior to his participation in the delicate deliberations in Geneva. Nor, as one who is not a member of those committees of the Congress which have been briefed--if not consulted--on this matter, do I wish to appear impetuous or an alarmist in my evaluation of the situation. But the speeches of President Eisenhower, Secretary Dulles and others have left too much unsaid, in my opinion--and what has been left unsaid is the heart of the problem that should concern every citizen. For if the American people are, for the fourth time in this

century, to travel the long and tortuous road of war--particularly a war which we now realize would threaten the survival of civilization--then I believe we have a right--a right which we should have hitherto exercised--to inquire in detail into the nature of the struggle in which we may become engaged, and the alternative to such struggle. Without such clarification the general support and success of our policy is endangered.

Inasmuch as Secretary Dulles has rejected, with finality, any suggestion of bargaining on Indo-China in exchange for recognition of Red China, those discussions in Geneva which concern that war may center around two basic alternatives:

The first is a negotiated peace, based either upon partition of the area between the forces of the Viet Minh and the French Union, possibly along the 16th parallel; or based upon a coalition government in which Ho Chi Minh is represented. Despite any wishful thinking to the contrary, it

should be apparent that the popularity and prevalence of Ho Chi Minh and his following throughout Indo-China would cause either partition or a coalition government to result in eventual domination by the Communists.

The second alternative is for the United States to persuade the French to continue their valiant and costly struggle; an alternative which, considering the current state of opinion in France, will be adopted only if the United States pledges increasing support. Secretary Dulles' statement that the "imposition in Southeast Asia of the political system of Communist Russia and its Chinese Communist ally . . . should be met by united action" indicates that it is our policy to give such support; that we will, as observed by The New York Times last Wednesday, "fight if necessary to keep Southeast Asia out of their hands"; and that we hope to win the support of the free countries of Asia for united action against communism in Indo-China, in spite of the fact that such nations

have pursued since the war's inception a policy of cold neutrality.

I think it is important that the Senate and the American people demonstrate their endorsement of Mr. Dulles' objectives, despite our difficulty in ascertaining the full significance of its key phrases.

Certainly I for one favor a policy of a "united action" by many nations whenever necessary to achieve a military and political victory for the free world in that area, realizing full well that it may eventually require some commitment of our manpower.

But to pour money, materiel and men into the the jungles of Indo-China without at least a remote prospect of victory would be dangerously futile and self-destructive. Of course, all discussion of "united action" assumes the inevitability of such victory; but such assumptions are not unlike similar predictions of confidence which have lulled

the American people for many years and which, if continued, would present an improper basis for determining the extent of American participation.

Permit me to review briefly some of the statements concerning the progress of the war in that area, and you will understand why I say that either we have not frankly and fully faced the seriousness of the military situation, or our intelligence estimates and those of the French have been woefully defective.

In February of 1951, for example, the late Brigadier General Francis G. Brink, then Head of the United States Military Advisory Group in Indo-China, told us of the favorable turn of events in that area as a result of new tactics designed by General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny. In the fall of that same year, General De Lattre himself voiced optimism in his speech before the National Press Club here in Washington; and predicted victory, under certain conditions, in eighteen

months to two years, during his visit to France.

In June of 1952, American and French officials issued a joint communique in Washington expressing the two countries' joint determination to bring the battle to a successful end; and Secretary of State Acheson stated at his press conference that "The military situation appears to be developing favorably . . . Aggression has been checked and recent indications warrant the view that the tide is now moving in our favor . . . We can anticipate continued favorable developments."

In March 1953, the French officials again came to Washington, again issued statements predicting victory in Indo-China, and again joined with the United States in a communique planning military action and United States support which would achieve their new goal of decisive military victory in two years.

In May of 1953, President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles told the Congress that our Mutual Security Program for France and Indo-China

would help "reduce this Communist pressure to manageable proportions." In June an American military mission headed by General O'Daniel was sent to discuss with General Navarre in Indo-China the manner in which United States aid "may best contribute to the advancement of the objective of defeating the Communist forces there"; and in the fall of last year General O'Daniel stated that he was "confident that the French-trained Vietnam Army when fully organized would prevail over the rebels."

In September of 1953 French and American officials again conferred, and in announcing a new program of extensive American aid, again issued a joint communique restating the objective of "an early and victorious conclusion."

On December 2, 1953, Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter S. Robertson told the Women's National Republican Club in New York--in words almost identical with those of Secretary of State Acheson eighteen months earlier--

that: "In Indo-China . . . we believe the tide now is turning." Later the same month Secretary of State Dulles stated that military setbacks in the area had been exaggerated; and that he did not "believe that anything that has happened upsets appreciably the timetable of General Navarre's plan", which anticipated decisive military results by about March 1955.

In February of this year, Defense Secretary Wilson said that a French victory was "both possible and probable" and that the war was going "fully as well as we expected it to at this stage. I see no reason to think Indo-China would be another Korea." Also in February of this year, Undersecretary of State Smith stated that "The military situation in Indo-China is favorable . . . Contrary to some reports, the recent advances made by the Viet Minh are largely 'real estate' operations . . . Tactically, the French position is solid and the officers in the field seem confident of their ability to deal with the situation."

Less than two weeks ago, Admiral Radford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that "The French are going to Win." And finally, in a press conference some days prior to his speech to the Overseas Press Club in New York, Secretary of State Dulles stated that he did not "expect that there is going to be a Communist victory in Indo-China"; that "In terms of Communist domination of Indo-China, I do not accept that as a probability"; that "We have seen no reason to abandon the so-called Navarre plan", which meant decisive results only one year hence; and that the United States would provide whatever additional equipment was needed for victory over the Viet Minh", with the upper hand probably to be gained "by the end of the next fighting season."

Despite this series of optimistic reports about eventual victory, every member of the Senate knows that such victory today appears to be desperately remote, to say the least, despite tremendous amounts of economic and material aid

from the United States, and despite a deplorable loss of French Union manpower. The call for either negotiations or additional participation by other nations underscores the remoteness of such a final victory today, regardless of the outcome at Bien Dien Phu. It is, of course, for these reasons that many French are reluctant to continue the struggle without greater assistance; for to record the sapping effect which time and the enemy have had on their will and their strength in that area is not to disparage their valor. If "united action" can achieve the necessary victory over the forces of communism, and thus preserve the security and freedom of all Southeast Asia, then such united action is clearly called for. But if, on the other hand, the increase in our aid and the utilization of our troops would only result in further statements of confidence without ultimate victory over aggression, then now is the time when we must evaluate the conditions under which that pledge is made.

For I am frankly of the belief that no amount of American military assistance in Indo-China can

conquer an enemy which is everywhere and at the same time nowhere, "an enemy of the people" which has the sympathy and covert support of the people. As succintly stated by the Report of the Judd Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in January of this year: "Until political independence has been achieved an effective fighting force from the Associated States cannot be expected . . . The apathy of the local population to the menace of Viet Minh communism disguised as nationalism is the most discouraging aspect of the situation. That can only be overcome through the grant of complete independence to each of the Associated States. Only for such a cause as their own freedom will people make the heroic effort necessary to win this kind of struggle." This is an analysis which is shared, if in some instances grudgingly, by most American observers. Moreover, without political independence for the Associated States, the other Asiatic nations have made it clear that they regard this as a war of colonialism; and the "united action" which is said

to be so desperately needed for victory in that area is likely to end up as unilateral action by our own country. Such intervention, without participation by the armed forces of the other nations of Asia, without the support of the great masses of the peoples of the Associated States, with increasing reluctance and discouragement on the part of the French--and, I might add, with hordes of Chinese Communist troops poised just across the border in anticipation of our unilateral entry into their kind of battleground--such intervention, Mr. President, would be virtually impossible in the type of military situation which prevails in Indo-China.

This is not a new point, of course. In November of 1951, I reported upon my return from the Far East as follows:

> "In Indo-China we have allied ourselves to the desperate effort of a French regime to hang on to the remnants of empire. There is no broad, general support of the native Viet Nam Government

> among the people of that area. To check the southern drive of Communism makes sense but not only through reliance on the force of arms. The task is rather to build strong native non-Communist sentiment within these areas and rely on that as a spearhead of defense rather than upon the legions of General de Lattre. To do this apart from and in defiance of innately nationalistic aims spells foredoomed failure.

In June of last year, I sought an amendment to the Mutual Security Act which would have provided for the distribution of American aid, to the extent feasible, in such a way as to encourage the freedom and independence desired by the people of the Associated States. My amendment was soundly defeated on the grounds that we should not pressure France into taking action on this delicate situation; and that the new French Government could be expected to make "a decision which would obviate the necessity of this kind of amendment or resolution." The

distinguished majority leader assured us that "We will all work, in conjunction with our great ally, France, toward the freedom of the people of those States."

It is true that only two days later on July 3 the French Government issued a statement agreeing that "There is every reason to complete the independence of sovereignty of the Associated States of Indo-China by insuring . . . the transfer of the powers . . . retained in the interests of the States themselves, because of the perilous circumstances resulting from the state of war." In order to implement this agreement, Bao Dai arrived in Paris on August 27 calling for "complete independence for Viet Nam."

I do not wish to weary the Senate with a long recital of the proceedings of the negotiations, except to say that as of today they have brought no important change in the treaty relationships between Viet Nam and the French Republic. Today the talks appear to be at an impasse; and the return from

Paris to Saigon of the Premier of Viet Nam, Prince Buu Loc, is not a happy augury for their success. Thus the degree of control which the French retain in the area is approximately the same as I outlined last year:

Politically, French control was and is extensive and paramount. There is no Popular Assembly in Viet Nam which represents the will of the people that can ratify the treaty relationship between Viet Nam and the French. Although the Associated States are said to be "independent within the French Union", the French always have a permanent control in the High Council and in the Assembly of the Union; and the Government of France guides its actions. Under Article 62 of the French Constitution, the French Government "coordinates" all of the resources of the members of the Union placed in common to guarantee its defense, under policies directed and prepared by the French Government. French Union subjects are given special legal exemptions, including the privilege of extraterritoriality.

The French High Commissioner continues to exercise powers with respect to the internal security of the Associated States, and will have a similar mission even after the restoration of peace. When Vietnamese taxes affect French Union subjects, there must be consultation with the representatives of the countries concerned before they are imposed. The foreign policy of Viet Nam must be coordinated with that of France, and the French must give consent to the sending of diplomatic missions to foreign countries. Inasmuch as the French did not develop experienced governmental administrators before World War II, they have guided to some degree actions within the local governments by requiring the Vietnamese Government to turn to them for foreign counselors and technicians.

Militarily, French control is nearly complete. The United States has in the past dealt primarily with the French military authority, and these in turn deal with the Associated States. Our equipment and aid is turned over to the French who will then arrange for its distribution according to their

decision, The French are granted for a period of time without limit facilities for bases and garrisons.

Culturally, the French are directly in contact with the training of intellectual youths of Vietnam, inasmuch as France joined in the establishment of the University, installed a French rector, and provided that all instructions would be in French.

Economically, French control of the country's basic resources, transportation, trade and economic life in general is extensive. In Viet Nam, estimated French control is nearly 100% in the field of foreign commerce, international and coastal shipping, and rubber and other export products. The French control 66% of the rice export trade. Moreover, possession of property belonging to the French cannot be changed without permission of the French; and France shares the veto right under the PAU agreement on matters affecting France's export and import trade.

All of this flies in the face of repeated assurances to the American people by our own

officials that complete independence has been or will be granted.

In February of 1951, for example, the American Minister to the Associated States, Donald Heath, told us that the French colonial regime had ended and that "all Indochinese Government services were turned over to the Indochinese states." In November of 1951, Assistant Secretary of State Dean Rusk again assured us that "The peoples of the Associated States are free to assume the extensive responsibility for their own affairs that has been accorded them by treaties with France."

Last year, the Department of State assured me that "France had granted such a full measure of control to the three States over their own affairs that . . . these three countries became sovereign states." In February of this year, Under-secretary of State Smith stated that the representatives of the Governments of Viet Nam and of France would "meet in Paris to draw up the treaty which will complete Vietnamese independence." And again Secretary Dulles stated last week that:

"Their independence is not yet complete, but the French Government last July declared its intention to complete that independence, and negotiations to consummate that pledge are actively under way."

I do not believe that the importance of the current breakdown of these negotiations has been made clear to the Senate or the people of the United States. Every year we are given three sets of assurances: First, that the independence of the Associated States is now complete; second, that the independence of the Associated States will soon be completed under steps "now" being undertaken; and, third, that military victory for the French Union forces in Indo-China is assured, or is just around the corner, or lies two year off. But the stringent limitations upon the status of the Associated States as sovereign states remain; and the fact that military victory has not yet been achieved is largely the result of these limitations. Repeated failure of these prophesies has, however, in no way diminished the frequency of their reiteration; and they have caused this nation to delay definitive

action until now the opportunity for any desirable solution may be past.

It is time, therefore, for us to face the stark reality of the difficult situation before us without the false hopes which predictions of military victory and assurances have given us in the past. The hard truth of the matter is first that without the wholehearted support of the peoples of the Associated States, without a reliable and crusading native army with a dependable officer corps, a military victory, even with American support, in that area is difficult if not impossible of achievement; and second, that their support cannot be obtained without a change in the contractual relationships which presently exist between the Associated States and the French Union.

Instead of approaching a solution to this problem, as Secretary Dulles indicated, French and Vietnamese officials appear to be receding from it. The Vietnamese, whose own representatives lack full popular support, recognizing that French opinion favoring a military withdrawal would become over-

whelming if all ties were entirely broken, have sought two treaties: one giving the Vietnamese complete and genuine independence, and the other maintaining a tie with the French Union on the basis of equality in the British Commonwealth. But nine months of negotiations have failed thus far to provide a formula for both independence and union which is acceptable to the parties currently in the Government of each nation. The French Assembly on March 9 substantially lessened the chances of such a solution through the adoption of a tremendously far-reaching rider--which received little attention in this country--which declared that France would consider her obligations toward Indo-Chinese states ended if they should revoke the clauses in the French Constitution that bind them to the French Union.

I realize that Secretary Dulles cannot force the French to adopt any course of action to which they are opposed; nor am I unaware of the likelihood of a French military withdrawal from Indo-China

once its political and economic stake in that area is gone. But we must realize that the difficulties in the military situation which would result from a French withdrawal would not be greatly different from the difficulties which would prevail after the intervention of American troops without the support of the Indo-Chinese or the other nations of Asia.

In Indo-China, as in Korea, the battle against communism should be a battle not for economic or political gain but for the security of the free world, and for those values and institutions which are held dear in France and throughout the non-Communist world as well as in the United States. It seems to me therefore that the dilemma which confronts us is not a hopeless one; that a victorious fight can be maintained by the French, with the support of this nation and many other nations--and most important of all, the support of the Vietnamese and other peoples of the Associated States--once it is recognized that the defense of Southeast Asia

and the repelling of Communist aggression are the objectives of such a struggle, and not the maintenance of political relationships founded upon ancient colonialism. In such a struggle, the United States and other nations may properly be called upon to play their fullest part.

If, however, this is not to be the nature of the war, if the French persist in their refusal to grant the independence and freedom desired by the peoples of the Associated States, and if those peoples and the other peoples of Asia remain aloof from the conflict, then it is my hope that Secretary Dulles, before pledging our assistance at Geneva, will recognize the futility of channeling American men and machines into that hopeless internecine struggle.

These are unpleasant facts and unpleasant alternatives which are before us, Mr. President. But in a nation such as ours, it is only through the fullest and frankest appreciation of such facts and alternatives that any foreign policy can be effectively maintained. In an era of supersonic

attack and atomic retailiation, extended public debate and education are of no avail once such a policy must be implemented. The time to study, to doubt, to review and revise--is now. For upon our decisions now may well rest the peace and security of the world--indeed the very continued existence of Mankind. And if we cannot entrust this decision to the people, as Thomas Jefferson once said, "If we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion by education."